

Reporter's Notebook

For Lithuanian City, the Embargo Is No Reason to Lose Composure

By BILL KELLER

Special to The New York Times

KAUNAS, Lithuania, April 29 — If it is a war of nerves that President Mikhail S. Gorbachev has been waging against Lithuania, there is no sign that he is winning it here in the republic's second city.

Kaunas has been burned to ashes 13 times since its medieval origins, and had already endured the raids of Teutonic knights, Napoleon and Nazi stormtroopers before Stalin's Red Army annexed the republic in 1940.

Now the city is weathering Moscow's embargo of oil and other essentials with a steady calm backed by history, faith and a sense of moral righteousness.

Along the old-town pedestrian thoroughfare that has been named, over time, Freedom Street, Stalin Street, and again Freedom Street, people talk of the economic blockade as something that may go on for months, and seem to welcome it as a test of citizenship.

"We understand that you have to pay for freedom, and we are ready to pay," said Algirdas Patackas, a Kaunas delegate to the Lithuanian Parliament, home for a brief respite from the capital in Vilnius, where he lives in a dormitory with several other officials.

He sipped coffee in a Freedom Street cafe with the Vice President of the republic, Ceslovas Stankevicius, another Kaunas resident. Occasionally one of the two officials popped up from the windowfront table to intercept a constituent or a local official strolling past.

No one complained of hardship, or suggested to the two officials that the Vilnius government should bend to accommodate Mr. Gorbachev.

In Vilnius, which once belonged to Poland, the embargo and the spreading unemployment have at least generated a mild anxiety. But Lithuanians say the unease in the capital is exaggerated by the high number of residents of non-Lithuanian descent, many of whom opposed the swift break with Moscow in the first place, and by the political gossip that is the culture of capitals everywhere.

In Kaunas, 65 miles to the northwest, the ethnic balance is more typical of the republic as a whole, with 80 percent Lithuanians. Here, the non-Lithuanians, most of them of Russian or Polish descent, are more likely to sympathize with the yearning for in-



The New York Times

Despite Moscow's economic pressure, Kaunas remains calm.

The structure and timing of a new Soviet-American trade agreement are being criticized in Congress. *Business Day*, page D1.

As East-West tensions ease, American soldiers are learning how to talk to Russians, not just spy on them. *Page A16*.

dependence. Kaunas is the birthplace of the independence movement, which people here tend to regard as more a continuation than a revolution.

Lithuanians say the calm is partly the Lithuanian temperament. T

But it is also perhaps the recent layers of emotional scar tissue that make the Lithuanians so unflinching.

Down Freedom Street at the Kaunas Roman Catholic basilica, an attendant named Jonas Poskus, 77 years old, grins with pride as visitors examine the baroque altar, then shakes goodbye with a hand consisting of a stump and a thumb.

He left the frostbitten fingers of his right hand in a labor camp near the Kolyma River in far eastern Siberia. Stalin's police pulled him off the streets, he said, "for being too well dressed."

Mr. Stankevicius, the vice president, finishing his coffee, said: "Our political assurance comes from moral assurance. A moral strength is the only strength we have."

Sights of Freedom Street

The last time Daiva Tamulaitiene

talked to an American reporter was in August 1987, when she hitch-hiked with her sister and a friend from Kaunas to Vilnius to stand nervously at the outskirts of a demonstration protesting Soviet repression.

In those days, the gathering of 500 people surrounded by police and K.G.B. agents was enough to make front-page news in the Western world. And going afterward for ice cream with a pair of foreign reporters was enough to nearly spoil a career.

Today Miss Tamulaitiene, a 30-year-old translator for a medical institute, pointed out the landmarks along Freedom Street — the churches, the old seminary, the flower-strewn spot where a Kaunas student set himself on fire in 1972 in a protest for independence — and mused about her generation's devotion to independence.

"We all, regardless of our generation, had our lives ruined by the Soviet system," she said. For her father, it was 10 years in Siberia. For her, it was the more complicated torture of growing under the rule of a foreign Government with the power to impose its own version of history.

This afternoon she explained why she had not kept in touch after that encounter in 1987. Upon their return to Kaunas, she said, she and her companions were taken into the Kaunas police station for an hour. One young man was dismissed from his job. Miss Tamulaitiene kept her job only by agreeing to sign a letter to her institute's newspaper warning against fraternizing with foreigners.

"When the police came, we ate your business cards," she said, blushing in embarrassment at a fear that seems now long ago but not far away.

Life on the Outside

The loneliest people in Kaunas these days are the remnants of the old Moscow-oriented Communist party, who now have little to do but rail at the indignities of life on the outside.

They are a little storm of agitation and bewilderment in the eye of the calm.

In December the Lithuanian Communist Party declared its support for independence and broke with Moscow, whereupon the true-red Communists splintered off again. They say they have 40,000 members in the re-



Associated Press

Lithuanians Mourn a Martyr of Independence

About 20,000 Lithuanians marched yesterday in a mourning procession through Vilnius with the remains of Stanislovas Zemaitis, their countryman who died last week of burns he received when he set

fire to himself in front of the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. In his suicide note, which was released on Friday, he said, "Lithuanians will not live in a Lithuania that is not independent."

public, less than half of them of Lithuanian descent.

When anyone talks about them at all, they are referred to disdainfully as "the Night Party" or "the Ceausescu Party" or more politely, the "Platformchiks" because of their adherence to the Kremlin platform. They hold 7 of the 138 seats in the republic's Parliament.

In Vilnius, the Platformchiks can at least boast that Moscow rewarded their loyalty by sending troops to secure their office space, and occasionally they muster an anti-independence demonstration.

But in Kaunas, the Moscow loyalists were shut out completely in local elections, rarely get time on television, and have dwindled to 2,000 members in a city of 400,000.

The party gamely support the economic sanctions Mr. Gorbachev has imposed to show his unhappiness with the disobedient republic, although those most immediately hit by the embargo have been the blue-collar factory workers the party says

are its constituency.

"These are not sanctions, not a blockade," said the Kaunas party leader, Rimvydas Tvarijonas. "They are a change in our economic relations."

"In a week the situation will be catastrophic in the factories," said Ignas V. Naujokas, an army lieutenant colonel and party official.

"Moral terrorism," thundered another party leader, Mikhail N. Kachanov, referring not to the oil embargo but the new leaders' domination of public opinion.

The older party members — there are few young ones — shake their heads at the way longtime acquaintances have deserted.

"Imagine, someone who for 35 or 40 years was not just red, but red as a cherry — and they just threw that away overnight," said Stasys Kairys, a 70-year-old party stalwart.

Of Lithuanian Mystics

A spectator of contemporary Lith-

uanian politics cannot leave Kaunas without stopping at the museum of Mikalojus Ciurlionis, the turn-of-the-century composer, painter and collector of Lithuanian folklore who is regarded as a sort of medium for the Lithuanian national character.

The canvases on display here mix pagan symbolism with Christian imagery, in a kind of Lithuanian mysticism.

One of the most devoted students of Ciurlionis is the republic's President, Vytautas Landsbergis, who has serenely ignored Moscow's threats and the Western world's cautions to lead his republic out of the Soviet Union.

The other day, a visitor asked Mr. Landsbergis if he recalled one of the folk tales collected by Ciurlionis, which ends with an old man advising a youth, "Don't go through life asking for permission."

The President smiled through his wispy beard.

"Oh yes," he said. "I know it by heart."

NEW YORK TIMES **INTERNATIONAL** SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 1990

Lithuania Comes of Age



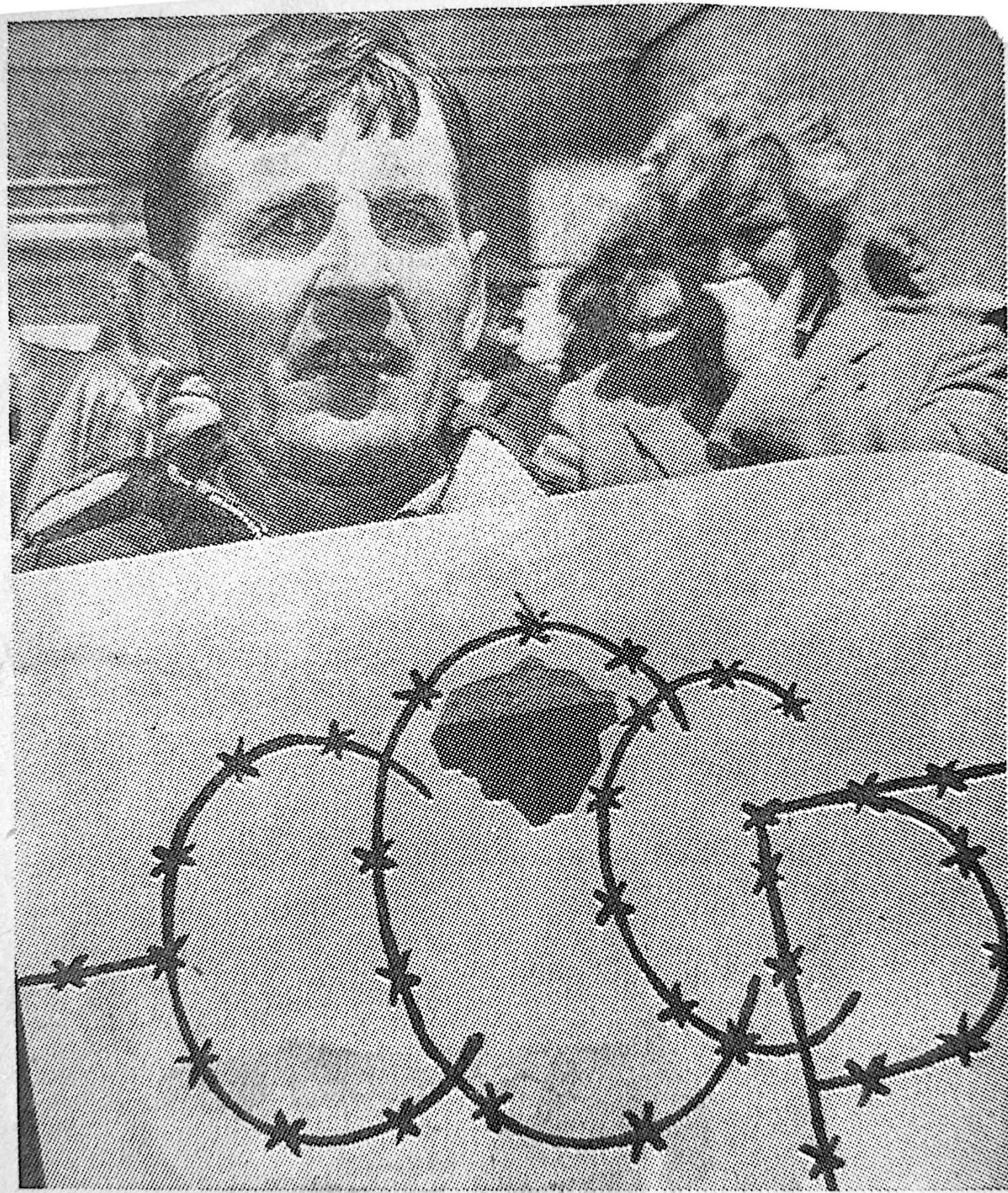
Associated Press

In its second week, the blockade has not caused serious hardships. A shortage of oil has severely curtailed the number of cars on Vilnius streets.



Reuters

Many Lithuanians say the Soviet embargo has fostered the republic's independence rather than forcing a compromise. In Vilnius, a militiaman talked with drivers blocking a street to protest Soviet intervention.



Associated Press

A protester with a sign reading "U.S.S.R." was among pro-independence demonstrators who gathered yesterday outside the Lithuanian Parliament in Vilnius while Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene briefed legislators on her meeting with President Mikhail S. Gorbachev.